

Activities to Help Prepare for Independence

*From ages birth to 3, encourage self-help with simple activities of daily living, seldom doing for children what they can do for themselves. Connect with Early Intervention programs in the community for help in assessing development and treating delays.

*By age 3-5, assign children developmentally appropriate household chores and give children opportunities to interact with others in a variety of situations. Enroll in preschool programs such as Head Start.

*By age 6-8, begin asking "what will you be when you grow up?"

*By age 8-10 begin helping the child interact directly with health care providers and take responsibility for their own health care.

*By age 10-12 provide career guidance including focus on abilities and interests and how the disabilities might affect career choices. Connect with the school system's school-to-work program, if available.

*By age 12 provide adolescents with transition workbooks or other activities which can help them focus on their talents, likes, personality traits, supports, challenges, and develop self-awareness. Young people can then look to the future and develop the vision, goals, skill development expectations, resources, and supports needed to be successful in adulthood.

*By age 12-13 consider helping young teens find small paying or volunteer jobs.

*By age 13-14 obtain written information about their state's vocational rehabilitation program and school-based transition programs.

*By age 14 develop a transition plan to adult living including health services.

*Between ages 14 and 18 ask the teen what he or she wants to do as an adult and how he or she hopes to make it happen. Help the teen and parents determine the need for assistance with development of marketable skills and other transition issues. If the child and family want help, facilitate referral to Vocational Rehabilitation services as appropriate and ensure that medical information is sent to the agency with proper signed releases. This may be the time for a teaching physical exam in which the young person and physician/nurse practitioner discuss normal concerns of all adolescents, pubertal changes and sexuality, the effects of the disability on future health, vocational choices, marriage and family (Johnson 1995).

*One year prior to discharge from the pediatric health care system, assist the adolescent to identify an appropriate adult health care provider, if needed, and plan for release and transfer of information to that provider. Seeing both the pediatric and adult health care provider within this last year of pediatric service would be ideal.

Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs: 1-800-232-1160